Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

Platoon Leading 101 is possibly one of the toughest courses our Army has to offer. I doubt few survive the course unscathed. Wrong turns, missed LDs, bright ideas gone awry, and other embarrassments mark the course for young platoon leaders as they master their craft. Recounted through the years, the stories take on epic proportions. Recently, I bumped into a member of my first platoon who recounted, in vivid detail, an unfortunate incident that involved me slaving a tank (it's amazing how much voltage the human body can take).

In this issue, Captain Douglas Crandall confesses the sins he committed as a new platoon leader — they look familiar. Crandall's apprehensions, concerns, and mistakes are not new. Generations of platoon leaders have made the same mistakes, wrestled the same demons, and asked themselves the same questions: "How do I prove myself to the platoon?" "How do I tell a platoon sergeant as old as my father what to do, especially when he has been doing it for 16 years?" Good lieutenants answer the tough questions, prove themselves, and move on to executive officer jobs or to the scout and support platoons.

Crandall mentions *FM 22-100, Leadership,* in his article and adds that books on leadership and the vaunted FM offered precious few "lessons upon which to draw," for his purposes. It occurs to me that we are literally besieged with the opportunities to learn leadership. We have *FM 22-100,* we have numerous periodicals which frequently devote entire issues to the topic, we have writing contests, awards, departments and faculty whose stated mission is the pedagogy of leadership, and there are hundreds of books written by experts, yet this young officer points out the most critical tool for him in learning to lead his platoon was simply examining his failures and learning from his mistakes. Not to disparage those engaged in the science of teaching leadership, but anyone who hopes to become a better or more effective leader must begin by examining his failures with a critical and objective eye, as Crandall (and certainly all leadership guides) advocate.

Of course, there are a couple of prerequisites for this technique to succeed. It won't work in a "zero-defect environment" where a single mistake dooms or damages a career. You must also be willing to admit your mistake and take responsibility for it. Too often, instead of admitting an error, we seek to spin, rationalize, or explain it away. When confronted with the evidence of an adulterous affair and the prospect of divorce recently, an aging rock star shifted the blame to a disease he suffers from — he's a sex addict. "Mistakes were made." "There was no controlling legal authority." Does anyone accept blame or responsibility anymore? Admit the error, accept responsibility and learn from it — good advice for everyone.

Sure, there are mistakes one should not recover from. And I am not advocating "a get out of jail free card" for young leaders; rather, that we keep in mind the process and transformation new platoon leaders go through and allocate the room to grow while providing the time and effort necessary to AAR them on their adventures.

In closing, I'd like to point out that several of the articles in this issue highlight the importance of teamwork in mounted warfare. Inside the cover, you'll find a piece on the Falklands that demonstrates the importance of the combined arms team in that conflict; Major Kevin Marcus writes about AC/RC assignments and illustrates another key partnership; the development of the tank-infantry team is detailed by Captain J.L. Mudd; and our brothers in the Engineer and Air Defense community weigh in with advice on how we can fight better as a combined arms team.

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